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When Waterloo, Iowa Was Young

By Roger Leavitt

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Roger Leavitt was born in Waterloo, is a Rotarian at Cedar Falls, Iowa, and Vice-president of the Cedar Falls National Bank and Cedar Falls Trust Co. This address was delivered by him before the Waterloo Rotary Club on April 1, 1929, and was printed by direction of the club.

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EIGHTY-FOUR years ago, or, to be more exact, on July 18, 1845, at the close of a hot summer day, and at the end of a 500-mile trek, there arrived at the east bank of the Cedar at the present site of the city of Waterloo, in a covered wagon, the George W. Hanna family. The tired oxen and more tired family were glad to camp for the night by the crystal-clear stream and rest and eat and sleep out under the stars.

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In an account written years later by Mrs. Hanna, she said: "When we drove up to the river I was charmed with the sight and said to my husband and brother, 'Oh, I did not think there was such a place this side of heaven.' I exclaimed, 'Boys, this is where we will have our town.' They laughed at me for selecting a place for a town where there were no people to build it."

In the morning Mr. Hanna wanted to settle on the east side, but the wife said, "I want to cross the Jordan into Canaan, the land of promise." As is usually the case, the wife had her way, and they forded the river about where the Illinois Central passenger station now stands, and on the 21st decided on the location of their farm, the first real farm in Black Hawk county, which is on the west side of the river, half way between Waterloo and Cedar Falls and still in the family.

The Hanna family has been one of the outstanding families in the history of this place, Phil Hanna being the latest to close a distinguished career. Squire Hanna, in partnership with Charles Mullan, laid out the village of Waterloo in 1854, and sold Mill square for $1 to a Mr. Eggers in return for his building a dam and saw mill. Mr. Hanna said they named it Waterloo because they expected a great victory in the county seat fight with Cedar Falls, which they saw was inevitable.

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up the papers and felt peeved that we attracted so little attention. The "Seventy Year Items" in 1930 and 1931 will be short two items.

When I arrived it was just a crude, rough, frontier village. I can recall distinctly how it looked as long ago as 1865. Commercial street, Fourth street, Mill square all stand out so vividly. The race had not been dug. The west side flour mill and the Schulte shops occupy the former site of a little white cottage with its garden and lawn surrounded by a white picket fence. It was the childhood home of Addie Hungerford. From Greten's fur store to the bridge was quite an incline. Right in front of the store was a bridge over a creek which ran from a pond occupying the lot where the Courier building now stands. I still can see the one-story wooden stores with their 57 varieties of sidewalks shaded with broad, wooden awnings. The streets were lined with hitching posts, and on busy days crowded with farmers' teams and lumber wagons loaded with wheat being hauled to the elevator. "Tama Jim" Wilson, when secretary of agriculture, told me that he hauled many loads of wheat to Waterloo from near Traer. In winter hogs were killed and dressed at home and brought to town to sell. I recall Pete Miller's two-wheel, one-horse dray and later Jack Slocum's dray drawn by two little mules with overalls on in summer to keep off the flies.

I can see the stores of Gilbert, Cutts, Stanton, Forry, Snowden, Hungerford, Jenney, Raymond, Wilkins, Kelly. Thunnisen's bakery was in a little, two-story building still standing across the street from the Courier office. I recall Robinson's store with boots and shoes in front, and hides and pelts and wool in the rear. I can smell it even after 60 years. I remember in the A. H. Frank store in 1871, just north of the Central House, his stock of ready-made clothing was largely army goods left over from the Civil War. He sold blue army overcoats with capes to the farmers, and paper collars to the town folks. Sindlinger sold ice cream and lemonade in a little shop south of the Central house. My chum and I used to

buy a five cent dish of ice cream with two spoons. The fastest eater got the most ice cream. There were no women clerks in any store or office. Men waited on even the finest ladies in their shirt sleeves and with hats on. Mr. Fowler, who made $20,000 building a portion of the Rock Island road, put the first delivery wagon on the streets of Waterloo in 1871. The only pretentious store building in West Waterloo was a double, three-story building owned by Mrs. Lamson's father, on the site of Lauerman's occupied in the sixties by the First National bank and Forry's drug store. The third floor was occupied by Russell's hall, by far the finest hall in town.

Among the notable lecturers heard in Waterloo in those days were Schuyler Colfax, Robert Ingersoll, Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Anna Dickinson and Theodore Tilton. I recall hearing the latter in 1868 in Russell's hall. He was the distinguished editor of the New York Independent. At that time Waterloo was in the midst of a hot campaign to decide whether sidewalk building was to be compulsory or not. We had no sidewalks except rough platforms in front of the stores, no two being the same height or size. In the residence sections there were paths if enough people walked along to wear a path. Father favored sidewalks. As we entertained the lecturer, father enlisted his assistance. Every little while in his lecture he would bring in "and Waterloo sidewalks under their feet." This brought down the house and was a factor in carrying the election. We built the first sidewalk.

You who live here now cannot conceive of our awful roads, deep with dust in summer, deep with mud in the spring. I have seen wagons on West Fourth street down to the hubs in the mud. We had no streetlights, and, though all the stores kept open till late at night, not many cared to brave the muddy trail after dark. The Courier of Oct. 17, 1877, said: "Last night the east business section put on quite a metropolitan air. A half a dozen street lamps have been erected on as many different corners and all of them

were trimmed and burning. They shed light enough so the pedestrians could avoid most of the mud puddles in the street."

About 1880 East Fourth street and Commercial street were covered with broken rock called macadam, after a distinguished engineer.

In 1865 the choicest corner in town was the west corner of Fifth and Commercial streets, occupied by B. J. Capwell & Co. grocery. In the rear part of the store was a well patronized bar presided over by Mart Adams, one of the town characters. A partner in the firm was Rufus Hatch, Rockford, Ill., who later became a wealthy business man in New York City, a power in Wall street.

The feeling between Cedar Falls and Waterloo was so bitter that Mr. Capwell could not get any boards sawed at Cedar Falls and had to go to Vinton to buy lumber for shelves.

Up to 1854 Black Hawk county was attached to Buchanan county, but in that year the county was organized and Cedar Falls made the county seat as it was the largest town in the county. On June 1 the upper floor of a small store building was rented for a courthouse.

On June 24, 1854, there was entered on the first page of the first record book, "Granted a petition of proprietors of the village of Waterloo to have plat recorded."

Waterloo had one advantage—it was much nearer the center of the county. Agitation was begun to move the county seat to Waterloo and as vigorously opposed by the people of Cedar Falls. The bitterness engendered by that fight has not yet disappeared. An unorganized mob came up from Waterloo to take the records by force, but the men of Cedar Falls armed with ancient hen fruit fought off the invaders. One of the invaders wore a high, silk hat, a wonderful target for eggs.

Then they tried a new plan. Men from Waterloo succeeded on Jan. 19, 1855, in securing an act from the legislature, authorizing the legal voters of the county to vote on the location of the county seat. The election was held April 2, 1855,

Cedar Falls received 260 votes and Waterloo received 388, having the support of the central and east portions of the county. There was much prestige in those days to the county seat town and it was a bitter pill to Cedar Falls when the records were transferred to a brick store building in west Waterloo owned by Judge Hubbard, just south of the present Hotel Russell-Lamson.

However, when the county voted in 1856 as to a permanent location of the courthouse, Cedar Falls got even with west Waterloo by combining with the smaller east side, and the new building was located and built on the river bank on the lower east side at Tenth street.

The pioneers of this county were hard-headed, forceful men. They came here, most of them, in covered wagons or on foot, as my father came, without money but with a determination to succeed. They were men of deep feeling. It took many years to overcome the passions aroused by the courthouse fight. When the west side business men met the incoming circus train at the round house and hired them to show on the west river bank near Seventh street, instead of the time-honored grounds beyond the I. C. shops, the east side business men felt sore, and when the east side business men succeeded in having the post office moved to their side of the river, Jan. 1, 1890, the west side business men felt equally sore. From this distance the many quarrels seem petty, but, my, how we did not love each other!

The following event had much more to do with Waterloo passing Cedar Falls in population than the change in the county seat. On March 31, 1861, the Dubuque & Sioux City railroad, or Illinois Central, as it is now called, reached Cedar Falls. Due to the Civil War, it was not built north or west for four years. When, in 1865, the road was started west it was necessary to shut the water off the race so the race bridge abutments could be built. The two flour mills, the largest in Iowa, I think, at that time, had to be closed down. As they were running to capacity night and day it meant a heavy loss and the mills asked the railroad $300

per day for the shutdown. The Overmans had given the railroad 40 acres as a site for the shops which they had planned to build. This was to have been the division point, but the railroad officials were so angry at the $300 a day damage charge that they changed the division to Waterloo and later, when ready to move the shops west of Dubuque, were easily persuaded to build them at Waterloo. Originally it was planned to build the I. C. railway from Waterloo to Cedar Falls on the west side of the river, crossing the Cedar just above the Mullan avenue bridge. The Rock Island freight track on the embankment between the Iowa Dairy Separator company and the John Deere Tractor company uses the old I. C. grade. The road was graded to Cedar Falls on the west side, following a line about half way between Cedar Heights drive and the old south road. You may still find some traces of it. The railroad was so hard up that it did not have money or credit to build the bridge at Waterloo. It was to receive many thousands of acres when it completed the hundred miles of track from Dubuque to Cedar Falls on which it planned to raise the needed funds. It was forced to abandon the west side grade and go to Cedar Falls on the level, easily graded east side. So the whole future of both Waterloo and Cedar Falls turned on the justice or injustice of the charge of a few hundred dollars.

Many of the stores were general stores, selling calico and candy, silks and dried herring, shoes and boots and bootjacks, and tea and hoop skirts and crackers, and other things too numerous to mention. Raymond Brothers, located on the Black Hawk National bank corner, had the largest exclusive grocery store. Screens on doors and windows were unknown. Flies bred by the millions in the many stables on the alleys. The smoked hams were covered with cloth and dipped in some yellow preservative. These were hung on hooks from the ceiling. I can see the millions of fly specks on the yellow covers. The dried beef, which also hung from the ceiling, was not protected, and made splendid roosting places for the

flies. Crackers and dried peaches came in open barrels. Canned peaches and canned cove oysters were the only foods so protected. Brown sugar came in barrels and hogsheads. We always sampled it as we passed by, first driving out the flies. One summer, Raymond shipped in a barrel of jerked buffalo meat. This was prepared by the Indians. The meat was cut into small strips and hung in the sun till dry and hard as a rock. Clean hands not guaranteed. It cost one cent a chunk. If your teeth were sharp you could strip off a shred. The flies could not faze it.

In those days we had no canned vegetables. In winter we could buy fresh oysters, which came in quart cans. Bathrooms and furnaces were unknown. Wood was plentiful, and my after-school job was to saw, split and carry in wood for the next day. Most boys were so employed.

We could stand in our barn door and look across the prairie to Kingbard hill and Prospect. Fourth street then was covered with ponds and sloughs. The trail over the prairie was a crooked one from where the M. E. church now stands coming back to the section line at the foot of Kingbard hill.

The first school was between Park avenue and Fourth street, on the north side of Jefferson. It was a small, log hut in which Sunday services were held in turn by the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches. The pews consisted of logs smoothed off with an ax, and no backs. About 1860 a block of ground between Sixth and Seventh streets on Washington street was bought. The first building erected burned December 6, 1870, but was rebuilt and still is being used. I learned my letters at Miss Field's seminary, at the head of Park avenue, starting in the public school at third grade. In the fourth grade we had a brutal teacher. One day Frank Wellman made a funny remark. We all laughed. The teacher had every boy march up to the desk and she beat him on each hand with a heavy ruler, but she did not touch the girls. I did not tell my parents. I was ashamed to. A few days later my mother visited school. The

teacher, between 9 and 10:15, whipped eight or 10 boys. My mother was furious. She went down town, saw the members of the board and reported the brutality. At 1 p. m. she attended a board meeting —the teacher quit at 4.

On Jan. 1, 1872, the total west side enrollment was 375. In 1873 among the west side high school pupils winning highest honors was Addie Hungerford, known and honored as the dean and queen of Waterloo business women. The first class to graduate from the West Side high school was the class of 1876, two girls and a boy, none of whom lives here now. The first class to graduate from East High was the class of 1877, consisting of two young ladies, one of whom still lives in Waterloo, Mrs. H. M. Reed. In 1878 the total cost of conducting the west side schools was $6,500. It is now around $350,000. I do not have the figures for the east side expenses 50 years ago. Among the members of the class of 1880, of West High, who still live in Waterloo, are Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Johnson, Clara Hunt and Ida Ayer. I hope some of you had the privilege of going to school to Clara Hunt and Ida Ayer. The value of their many years of unselfish service in West Waterloo schools cannot be measured in dollars, only in the lives of boys and girls.

In 1866 I remember distinctly visiting the primary grade of the east side schools. The teacher, Anna E. Perry, one of the finest teachers who ever served the Waterloo schools, died a few years ago in California. In 1866 all of the children of the east side attended school in a small, four-room building, which stood where the junior high now stands, and the rooms were not crowded.

When my father came to Waterloo the only means of crossing the river was by fording where Fourth street is now located or at Tenth street. There was probably not a bridge in Black Hawk county over any stream. The first bridge erected was over the Black Hawk on the Cedar Falls road, which was completed in the fall of 1854. My father told me that 75 years ago a day was consumed in making the journey from Chicago to the end

of the railroad then completed as far as Warren, Ill. Another day was required to make the journey by stage from Warren to Dubuque, a third day from Dubuque to Delhi; the fourth day Independence was reached, and the fifth day at about 3 p. m. the "fast mail" reached Waterloo. Only one mail a week was received, and the total number of letters each week was less than 30.

In early days the cows roamed the streets at will, picking up much grass in places now occupied by side walks and parks. Though my mother was reared on a farm, she did not approve of cows at large in town, so she got Frank Neely, a prominent lumber dealer, a neighbor of ours, to go around with her and they secured a well signed petition to the council to order the cows off the street, and it was done at once.

How I wish I could picture to you the Waterloo of those days so you could see it as it is in my childhood memory. Just a little frontier town, extending possibly three-fourths of a mile up and down both sides of the river, and extending out from the river five or six blocks in each direction. On the west side South street was rightly named. Only a few scattered houses beyond it. The site of the First M. E. church was then on the edge of the prairie. On the east side the prairie began a block north of the park. Most of the early settlers were poor and the houses reflected their poverty, little, one-story or story-and-a-half houses, most of them painted white and surrounded by picket fences, for the cows pastured in the streets. No pavement or street lights or sidewalks or crossings.

Park avenue west was called Main street and was laid out for the main business street, but, for some unknown reason, in the middle of the fifties the stores on Main street were abandoned and Commercial street from Fifth to Mill square was the business section. The block nearest the river on Fourth street east had unpretentious, one-story shops, with houses on the sites of Black's store and the First National Bank and beyond.

After the Civil war Waterloo began to grow rapidly again. Edmund Miller

built his fine residence, torn down a few years ago to make way for the Elks' club. The William Snowden house, now the Woman's club, and many other good homes were built. The Russell home, built a few years before, was the finest one in town. Gradually the town grew in size and wealth, as the surrounding county became settled, and from a frontier village Waterloo became a finely built city. But as I drive about your streets somehow my mind goes back to the days when Waterloo was young and poor and crude but energetic and determined and ambitious.

In the sixties and early seventies New Year calls were a most delightful social custom. Many homes were open, and anyone who desired might call. Callers began about 10 a. m. Sometimes two or three ladies received together. Refreshments were elaborate, but by the time one had called at eight or 10 houses and had eaten a meal of oysters, turkey, celery, ice cream or pie and coffee at each place he did not want any more to eat for a week. The men called in groups, usually two or four going together. It was not uncommon to have 100 men call during the day. One year almost 100 men went in one group from house to house, literally swamping the hostesses. That was about the last year New Year calls were made.

Many years ago one of our citizens was speaking at an Early Settlers' association meeting with great fervor, as he thought of days and events of long ago. He said, "I am a pioneer. I have practiced medicine here many years. Where are my patients? I'll tell you where they are. They are all lying out in the cemetery, and I alone am left."

In the seventies there was much boating. A boat club was formed by 12 of the leading young men. I can recall a few of them only, Fred Robertson, C. O. Balliett, Robert Manson, E. V. Hayden, D. W. Crouse, I. M. Hay, E. T. Cowin. They built three fine boats and a boat house near the present I. C. station. The young men each invited a young lady to join the club, and in the summer almost every evening was spent on the

river. Most of us who were younger used more plebian, flat-bottomed boats, and the river in the evening was a lively place. A number of sail boats added to the interest.

Our first bridge, built in 1859, was a wooden one with short spans and wooden piers. This was partially destroyed by a flood, April 16, 1867. It was repaired, and in 1872 replaced by an iron bridge. While the bridge was being built a ferry boat was used. One day the cable broke and the boat with one or two teams on it was swept over the dam but no one was injured.

I recall crossing on the ferry and going over just beyond the I. C. shops to the Great Eastern circus. Just as we were going from the animal tent into the main tent a storm tore down the whole outfit. As I ran out into the pouring rain and fierce wind, I heard some one yell, "The lions are loose." Did I run? I did. I almost passed myself on the road. I wish I could run that fast now. The storm, severe while it lasted, was soon over. No one had been badly injured, though all the main tents were blown flat. A very wet and bedraggled crowd wended its way homeward.

In the summer we went swimming every day either in the Black Hawk creek or up the river. A sand bar just across the river from the present bathing beach was a favorite resort. In the winter skating, sleigh riding, catching on bobs and sliding down hill were popular amusements. Our hill, before the street was cut down, the sidewalk lowered, and the yard terraced, was the steepest hill in town. A good sled could start by Paul Davis' house and go to the old Baptist church on Jefferson street.

We had a wonderfully fine lot of young people. Before the days of lipstick and drug store complexions, it was safe to play post office, spat 'em out, forfeits. If there was any kissing it was all in public, and no lasting harm was done. The girls used to skate and slide down hill and play out-of-door games so much they had beautiful, natural complexions that did not come off when you touched them. The girls of our neighborhood played tag,

pull-a-way, sheepfold just as much as the boys. My sister Lucy could outrun any boy in our crowd. She could beat any boy walking on high stilts and could step over a four-board fence and never touch it. Our place on Park avenue was the favorite community playground then as well as now. In the sixties and seventies we had a lot of evergreen trees in the yard, which made fine hiding places.

I was almost 13 when I first took a girl to an entertainment. I took Emma Logan, Will Logan's sister, to a church festival at Union hall, on the third floor of 114-16 Fourth street east. It was quite an event for both of us. I carried a little brass lantern, for the night was dark and stormy and there were no street lights, but the blamed thing went out.

Singing school and the slow walk home, sleigh rides and skating parties on bright, moonlight nights still linger as happy memories. Though a sedan may be warmer, it does not quite take the place of an old-fashioned cutter with your best girl tucked in at your side, under a warm fur robe with a hot soapstone to keep your feet warm. You had a good excuse for holding hands. Then, instead of a balky gas engine, imagine a spirited horse with bells ajingling as you drive to a neighborhood town on a bright, moonlight night over the crisp snow sparkling as if covered with diamonds. Then the hot oyster stew and the ride home again. Oh, boy, those were the days!

I was only a year old when the Civil war broke out, but I can recall at least one big war meeting in 1863, held on the steps of the old Congregational church, Fifth and Jefferson streets. As vividly as though it was yesterday, I remember April 15, 1865, the day my father came home in the middle of the forenoon and said to mother, "Lincoln has been shot and is dead." He threw himself on a bed and burst into tears. I had never seen my father cry before, and rarely did I see him cry again, for he was of the stern, self-controlled Puritan type who rarely showed their feelings. May I

quote briefly from a paper written possibly 30 years ago by Edwin Mesick? He writes thus: "The memories of '65. How they come sweeping over us notwithstanding the lapse of years! Will any old resident forget that ever-memorable night when the news flashed over the land that 'Lee had surrendered' and all knew this sounded the death knell of war? How the leading men of town, merchants, bankers, lawyers, ministers, doctors, formed a procession with torchlights and an impromptu band and marched shouting through the streets, singing 'Glory, Glory, Hallelujah.' Such a spontaneous outburst of joy never before was witnessed here. This was 11 p. m. Thursday. Then, from the very pinnacle of joy, what a plunge into the depths of despair, two days later. Is there a soul living in Waterloo of mature age who cannot remember that fateful Saturday morning when business houses were closed and men stood in whispering groups about the street, seemingly paralyzed, stunned by the sudden, awful news that our beloved president had been assassinated?" My father said that when the news came that Saturday morning men gathered on the sidewalks near the bank and as a picture of Lincoln was held aloft they sank to their knees to pray for their country, for it seemed as if the very foundation had been swept away.

On July 8, 1874, several of us boys went swimming in the river, half a mile below town. Thick, gathering clouds warned us to dress and hurry home. Just as I drove into the barn it began to rain. To the north were the darkest clouds I ever had seen. In a few moments a terrific wind was blowing. This lasted only a few minutes, but it was long enough. Our front doors blew in. There went crashing down Fowler's barn on Park avenue, Stewart's brick blacksmith shop on Fourth street west, the steeple of St. Mark's church on Commercial street, where Brown's apartments now stand, and the steeple of the Presbyterian church, Fourth and Jefferson, the roof of the west side mill, scores of trees and almost every chimney in town. It was the

hardest storm Waterloo ever experienced. I have not even yet quite recovered from my fright.

When my father came to town in September, 1854, he stopped at the Sherman house, a log hotel standing on the site of the auto parking grounds next to the Rialto on Commercial street. Later a three-story frame addition was built in front and it was called the Central house, the most pretentious hotel in this part of Iowa, and the stage terminal from Cedar Rapids. On June 17, 1884, the Irving hotel was opened for business. There was a grand banquet at $5 per plate to start things off. In my scrap book I have the printed menu. Thirteen kinds of meat, 10 kinds of cake with all sorts of jellies, salads, desserts, etc. A little after 11 p. m. the bus driven by "Shorty," for many years a noted bus driver, brought the first traveling guests, and with much interest I watched them sign the register.

In 1875, during the cold weather, Waterloo had its strangest epidemic, affecting most all the horses. They called it "epizootic." The horses were sick for some time and could not be used. The bus was drawn by a yoke of oxen, not as speedy as the modern taxi. People had to carry home their purchases; the streets surely looked empty.

On Aug. 8, 1869, occurred the only full eclipse of the sun that I ever saw. As I recall, it was complete about 3 p. m. I stood on top of the building formerly occupied by Asquith's and with a smoked glass watched the rare and beautiful sight. Many scientists came to Iowa from different parts of the United States to observe the phenomenon. It grew dark, roosters crowed, chickens went to roost. Some thought the end of the world had come. It was very impressive.

Then, as now, the Cedar river was one of our greatest assets for beautifying the landscape. Up to 1884 there were two beautiful islands below the dam, one small one which stood about where the first pier of the Fifth street bridge stands on the west side out in the river, the other much larger, 500 feet by 150, near the east bank from Sixth to Eighth

street. In an early day there was a house on that island. Gradually the floods reduced their size and, in 1884, they disappeared.

On Saturday, May 25, 1861, a group of Waterloo business men organized the first fire department—"Hook and Ladder Company No. 1." They elected as president J. H. Leavitt, my father; vice president, W. H. Hartman, John Hartman's father; treasurer, G. W. Miller, father of George B. Miller. Later this hook and ladder apparatus was sold to the German Hook and Ladder company, of which John Nauman, uncle of the Nauman boys, was assistant foreman. In 1868 the Red Jacket fire engine was bought from the Chicago Fire Department for $1,000. It was a fine engine and served at many a fire as well as contest, till the Jeanie Jewell, the first steam fire engine, was bought in 1879, after an exciting test of three different makes.

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The census of 1866 gave Waterloo a population of 3,031. Of these three were bankers, 11 doctors, 12 ministers, 15 blacksmiths, 18 grocers and 72 carpenters, showing that the town was growing rapidly. Folks were folks, whether it was 1854 or 1929. Each generation has had its customs, but only one generation can be pioneers. As a boy in the sixties I saw a constant stream of white-topped settler wagons go by our place on Park avenue. Most of them were drawn by slow-going oxen that brought to Iowa the finest body of men and women who ever settled and built up a new country. We were fortunate in having such a large percentage of fine women as pioneers in Waterloo and Black Hawk county. Only the stout of heart dared come to a new country, and in such a country the indolent and the vicious fell by the wayside. Only the best could survive.

We have entered into their inheritance. We are enjoying the fruits of their labors and hardships. They went without that we might have; they suffered that we might be free from suffering. Here's, then, to the pioneers of Waterloo. May we pass on to our children as worthy an inheritance as our ancestors did to us.

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